

Depression

Everybody has "the blues" or "feels down" from time to time. It's normal to feel sad for short periods, especially if something bad had happened in our lives. But those of us who suffer from depression have much more than "the blues", and our feelings can last for a long time.

There are many sufferers of this illness; at any one time, 5% of Canadians are depressed, and 10-20% will suffer from it at one point in their lives.

But family and friends who've never experienced true depression can have trouble understanding what it's like. Many people find it difficult to think of depression as an illness because there are no obvious physical symptoms. But depression is an illness, which is caused by chemical changes in the brain. Few people think that a physical illness is the sufferer's fault-and no one should think depression is, either.

Like any other illness, depression has certain symptoms. Once these have been recognized, you can take measures to treat them. Some are: feeling sad, worried or depressed; feeling as if your life is dreary and unlikely to improve; had crying spells; become irritated over little things that didn't used to bother you; find you no longer enjoy hobbies and activities that once made you happy; feel a lack of self-confidence or feeling like a failure; lost your appetite, or are eating more than usual; have had trouble sleeping, or been sleeping too much; had trouble concentrating and making decisions; and thought about death and/or suicide.

Knowing the causes for depression can help depressed people, friends, family understand how painful it is and why it's not possible to "snap out of it". It's still not completely clear why depression happens to some of us and not to others, but there are some triggers: stressful events or a loss, physical illness, hormone levels, and use of certain medications, drugs, or alcohol.

Most of us think sadness when we think of depression, but there are other physical, emotional, and mental effects, too. Many depressed people feel helpless, and as if this is the way that they are going to feel forever. They have a lack of energy and a lack of interest in life. It's hard for them to ever imagine feeling happy or excited again. Some may withdraw and be less sociable. They may also become short-tempered and difficult to please. No one can do anything right. The world of depression is a lonely place to be.

Physical problems can also occur. Some may have trouble getting to sleep or wake up a lot during the night. Others just want to sleep all the time. It can also cause someone to lose his or her appetite, or want to eat all the time. They may crave sweets, and have stomach pains, constipation, headaches, sweating, a racing heart, or other symptoms.

But these days, there are many ways to treat depression. That means no depressed person should suffer needlessly. Medical care, antidepressant medications, counselling, and the support of family and friends are all effective in treating depression. Keep in mind that the most important step in treating depression is SEEKING HELP. If you are depressed, please take a few minutes to call your doctor today, so you can start feeling better as soon as possible. And remember... there is hope.

